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CORONAVIRUS

# Coronavirus in Illinois updates: Here's what happened March 20 with COVID-19 in the Chicago area

By CHICAGO TRIBUNE STAFF  
CHICAGO TRIBUNE | MAR 20, 2020



FEEDBACK

Ross Ewing gets a drive-thru COVID-19 test from phlebotomist Sydnie Booker at a testing site in the parking lot of the Foreman Mills

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VOTING GUIDE

Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker **[issued a “stay-at-home” order](#)** Friday for the entire state starting Saturday at 5 p.m. through April 7. Residents can still go to the grocery stores, put gas in their cars, take walks outside and make pharmacy runs, the governor said at a news conference.

Pritzker also announced another coronavirus-related death, a Cook County woman in her 70s. It's the state's fifth death associated with COVID-19. State officials **[reported 163 new cases](#)** of the virus on Friday, bringing the total since the start of the outbreak to 585.

**[Gov. Pritzker issued a stay-at-home order. What does that mean? »](#)**

At the same news conference, Mayor Lori Lightfoot said Chicago park facilities and libraries will be closed as of 5 p.m. Saturday. People will still be able to walk around in the park space, she said. The governor also announced that the shutdown of Illinois elementary and high schools will be **[extended through at least April 7](#)**. CPS had already extended its shutdown through April 20.

Earlier on Friday, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said the Trump administration has decided to **[push the income tax filing date to July 15 from April 15](#)**, while the president announced the U.S. and Mexico will **[sharply curtail cross-border travel](#)**.

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Globally, **[more than 10,000 people had died from COVID-19](#)** since the outbreak began late last year in China, according to tracking by Johns Hopkins University. In addition to Illinois, **[New York state also joined California on Friday](#)** in ordering nearly all residents to stay home.

FEEDBACK

The Tribune is keeping a **[running list of Chicago-area closings and cancellations](#)** and **[asking experts to answer your questions about COVID-19](#)**.

*Here are the latest updates Friday on the coronavirus in the Chicago area and Illinois:*

## **7:36 p.m.: Coronavirus concerns closed thousands of stores this week. Here are some still open in the Chicago area.**

U.S. retailers from Apple to Urban Outfitters are closing thousands of stores across the country in an attempt to slow the new coronavirus' spread.

But for more stores have closed in the past few days as businesses encouraged employees to work from home, here

On Friday, Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker [issued a stay-at-home order](#) for the entire state beginning 5 p.m. Saturday through April 7, requiring all but essential businesses such as grocery stores, pharmacies and gas stations to close.

Though many Chicago-area residents have been stocking up for days, people will still be able to leave home to shop for essentials under the order. So if your initial stock-up supplies are running low and you can't or don't want to wait for an online order, what's still open? [Read more here.](#) —*Lauren Zumbach*

### **6:43 p.m.: First 4 cases of coronavirus recorded at Holy Cross Hospital**

The first cases of COVID-19 to be treated at Sinai Health System have been confirmed Friday evening, all of whom were treated at Holy Cross Hospital, on the city's Southwest Side.

One patient came through the emergency room on Friday afternoon, and three others were admitted earlier this week, Dan Regan, spokesman for Sinai Health System, said in a statement.

The person from the ER was discharged to their home for isolation and the three others had been waiting for test results, which came back positive this afternoon, according to Regan. They remain at Holy Cross.

Citing patient privacy, Regan said they could offer no additional details about their conditions or treatment.

Holy Cross is located at 2701 W. 68th St. in the city's Marquette Park neighborhood.

Suspected COVID-19 patients are placed in isolation for testing and treatment, and Sinai works in coordination with the Chicago Department of Public Health, the statement said.

These four marked the first patients to test positive for COVID-19 at Sinai Health System, which consists of seven hospitals and health care centers, including Holy Cross Hospital. —*Rosemary Sobol*

### **6:30 p.m.: Ordered to stay home, Chicagoans already were preparing to hunker down**

FEEDBACK

By the time Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker announced an order requiring Illinois residents to "stay at home" in an attempt to contain the new coronavirus pandemic, shoppers stocking up before the weekend [were prepared for the news.](#)

"I'm making this not as a panic run. It's an odds-and-ends run, so we won't be tempted to go out later," said Alaina Tucker, 40, of Chicago's North Center neighborhood.

She was picking up peanut butter, applesauce, Diet Coke and paper products at a Costco store on Clybourn Avenue after making a stock-up trip last week. Around 1:45 p.m., the line to enter stretched roughly 10 minutes.

Samantha Cooper, 29, waiting patiently in the checkout line at a Jewel-Osco in the West Loop Friday afternoon, hadn't heard about the order but said it wouldn't change her plans: hunker down for the near future.

"We're pretty well stocked up, so this was going to be my last run before we stay inside for the next two weeks," Cooper said. "If that's what they have to do to contain this, I'm all for it."

crowds.

Though several pharmacies and retailers selling groceries, household supplies and medicine have trimmed hours to give workers more time to clean and restock, they've generally remained open.

Walgreens, CVS, Jewel-Osco, Mariano's, Home Depot and Blain's Farm and Fleet said Friday that their stores are considered essential under the governor's order and will remain open. [Read more here](#). —*Lauren Zumbach, Lori Rackl, Tracy Swartz, Ryan Ori and Abdel Jimenez*

## 6:02 p.m.: Coronavirus has those who celebrate Nowruz, the Persian New Year, retooling their usual festivities

The table in a Persian home is set up for the Iranian new year with very specific items. Seven foods that start with the Persian letter for "S" are displayed, and they each symbolize specific things, like sabzeh — sprouts — for rebirth, or sekkeh — coins — for prosperity.

This year, the quip goes, there will be some additions to the table: soap and sanitizer.

The holiday, which coincides with the spring equinox and was celebrated by most Persian populations Thursday night, is called Nowruz, meaning "new day." It is commemorated with several traditions and, crucially, the visiting of family members. Because of coronavirus-related warnings to refrain from gathering in groups of more than 10 people, Nowruz this year is muted, except online. [Read more here](#). —*Nausheen Husain*

## 6:02 p.m.: The race is on to save small businesses during the coronavirus pandemic. Is government up to the task?

On a summer weekend night, Logan Square's Park & Field can pull in as much as \$50,000 in bar and food sales.

On Thursday, Park & Field's delivery service, cobbled together in response to a government-mandated shutdown of dine-in business, an effort to stem the spread of the new coronavirus, earned the restaurant \$222.

"It's not exactly going great," Park & Field co-owner Dave Nalezny said. "But we're doing what we can."

FEEDBACK

Nalezny and his partners — his wife and his brother, who launched the restaurant three years ago with personal savings and a loan using Nalezny's home as collateral — have enough money to cover about two weeks of expenses.

Survival of the business beyond that likely depends on government relief, whether loans, grants, delayed deadlines for tax bills — or all of the above. On Thursday, a major hurdle was cleared in Illinois as the Small Business Administration's coronavirus disaster loan program became available across the state.

The key, though, is getting the money to businesses as quickly as possible, said Ashley Brandt, an attorney representing more than 120 Chicago-area small businesses who has been blogging about SBA loans to keep his clients updated. [Read more here](#). —*Josh Noel*

## 5:58 p.m.: As coronavirus shuts church doors, Catholic parishes fight drastic drop in collections

Last week, the Archdiocese of Chicago made the unprecedented decision to suspend all religious services in response

“This was not a decision made I made lightly,” Cardinal Blase Cupich said. “The Eucharist is the source and summit of our life as Catholics.”

As the government and health officials try to manage the pandemic, the financial ramifications are far-reaching for one of the nation’s largest religious institutions.

No ushers with collection baskets moving up the aisles during Sunday Mass has eliminated one of the archdiocese’s largest revenue streams, which could threaten the financial security of parishes across the archdiocese. [Read more here](#). —*Javonte Anderson*

### **5:46 p.m.: 3rd resident of Evanston senior living facility tests positive**

A third resident has tested positive for COVID-19 at Three Crowns Park senior living facility in Evanston, the executive director reported in a letter Friday.

Executive Director Phil Hemmer also said the first two residents who tested positive for COVID-19 on Sunday and Monday will return to their homes at the facility Friday and will remain in isolation.

The Three Crowns Park residents are among the 21 residents who have tested positive for COVID-19 in Evanston as of Friday afternoon, according to the city of Evanston. [Read more here](#). —*Genevieve Bookwalter*

### **5:30 p.m.: Lake County, Illinois reporting nearly a dozen new cases**

Eleven new cases have been confirmed since Thursday, bringing the total number of Lake County residents who have tested positive for the disease to 49 since March 11, a statement from the county health department said.

“At this time, there is sufficient capacity in Lake County to care for those with severe illness who require hospitalization,” the statement read.

Commercial labs in the area are continually working to increase their testing capacity, and the state is working with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Wal-Mart, and Walgreens to set up drive-thru testing sites in the hardest hit areas of the state, according to the statement. These facilities will focus on senior citizens, first responders, and healthcare workers.

FEEDBACK

“In light of the ‘stay at home’ order issued by the state that goes into effect tomorrow evening, we ask that all residents help us reduce new infections in Lake County,” said Lisa Kritz, Director of Prevention for the Lake County Health Department in the statement. If you can, stay home...and absolutely stay home if you are sick. —*Rosemary Sobol*

### **4:55 p.m.: ‘Stay at home’ order will close all libraries in Chicago, to the relief of librarians who worried about unsafe conditions**

All Chicago libraries will close Saturday evening under the “stay at home” order, to the relief of librarians who had complained they were being forced to work despite their safety concerns.

The libraries will close at 5 p.m. Saturday under the order issued by Gov. J.B. Pritzker.

Earlier in the week, the Chicago Public Library announced it planned to close 61 of the city’s 81 libraries over the

branches during the coronavirus outbreak.

John Rayburn, president of AFSCME Local 1215, called the initial decision “senseless.”

“People are afraid, they’re scared,” Rayburn said. “You can’t ask someone to perform their job if they’re scared.”

When Rayburn learned the city would close all libraries on Saturday, he said he was grateful to Pritzker and Mayor Lori Lightfoot. “I would just like to thank them both,” he said. “And hopefully the people of Illinois can overcome this.” —*Sophie Sherry*

### 4:52 p.m.: Illinois closing all vehicle emissions testing stations

Beginning Saturday, the state is closing all vehicle emissions testing stations in Illinois through April 7, due to the coronavirus. The state earlier extended vehicle registration expiration date by 30 days.

### 4:23 p.m.: Lightfoot: ‘This is not a lockdown or martial law’

Seeking to ease some concerns from citizens over the sweeping nature of the governor’s order, Lightfoot said, “I want to say and be clear: This is not a lockdown or martial law.”

“Chicago’s grocery stores, pharmacies and clinics will remain open, and there’s absolutely no need to change your normal purchasing patterns. What I mean is, do not take this direction as a reason to run to the stores, buy everything in sight and hoard vital supplies. Please, the grocery stores will remain open and stocked so be mindful of your neighbors and do not hoard supplies.”

“Yes, you can still go outside for a walk, but practice social distancing. Remember this is the new normal for now. I think and I hope people recognize and understand these decisions are being made for the long-term health of everybody everywhere in our entire state.” —*Gregory Pratt*

In Chicago, Lightfoot said, hospitals will continue to treat patients, the CTA will run, airports will be open and your garbage will be collected.

### 3:19 p.m.: Facing steep ridership drops, transit agencies will ask for state, federal help

FEEDBACK

Public transit agencies, which are grappling with a sharp drop in riders because of the new coronavirus, face enormous losses and are expected to ask federal and state governments for billions of dollars in financial aid.

With schools shuttered and residents being urged to stay home to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, transit agencies nationwide have been operating largely empty trains and buses. CTA, Metra and Pace say they have been focused on providing service during the pandemic and keeping their trains and buses clean and disinfected.

But Metra and the South Shore Line, which runs from northwest Indiana into downtown Chicago, plan to cut back on train runs next week. And representatives for both Metra and Pace, the suburban bus service, said they plan to ask for federal and state help, though they did not say exactly how much they’ll ask for. [Read more here.](#) —*Mary Wisniewski*

### 3:11 p.m.: State crime lab scales back operations, leading to shelving of drug cases

Cook County prosecutors will be dropping all new drug cases as the coronavirus outbreak has led the state crime lab to reduce its operations to only urgent work involving violent crime.

The Illinois State Police laboratory is cutting down drastically on the number of forensic tests it is performing, so routine testing to confirm whether any suspected drugs are, in fact, narcotics, has been put on pause.

As a result, prosecutors have been instructed to dismiss all drug cases that have not yet been indicted or had a preliminary hearing — the early procedural hurdles a case must clear before it can continue to trial — if testing is not complete on those cases, according to documents obtained by the Tribune. [Read more here.](#) —*Megan Crepeau and Jeremy Gerner*

### **3:10 p.m.: Pritzker issues 'stay at home' order starting Saturday, announces new coronavirus death**

Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker today issued a “stay at home” order for the entire state starting Saturday at 5 p.m. through April 7. [Read the order here.](#)

Pritzker also announced another coronavirus-related death, a Cook County woman in her 70s. It's the state's fifth death associated with COVID-19.

State officials also announced 163 new cases of COVID-19, bringing the total since the start of the outbreak to 585. With new cases in Adams, Christian and McLean counties, the virus has been detected in 25 counties, with patients ranging in age from 3 to 99.

Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot also said effective tomorrow at 5 p.m. all city parks and libraries will be closed for the duration of the order.

Like Pritzker, Lightfoot emphasized the importance of Pritzker's decision in possibly saving lives.

"The coronavirus will not go away by happenstance," she said. She added: "Now is not the time for half measures."

### **2:57 p.m.: Lightfoot administration says it has received about 300 requests for loans through new small business program**

FEEDBACK

Mayor Lori Lightfoot's administration says it has received about 300 requests for loans through a city program the mayor announced Thursday night designed to help small businesses whose bottom lines have been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic.

The Chicago Small Business Resiliency Loan Fund will start accepting applications at the end of March, then start handing out loans of up to \$50,000 each to businesses with fewer than 50 employees that can show they've suffered a sharp reduction in revenue thanks to the virus-driven economic downturn, city Chief Financial Officer Jennie Huang Bennett said Friday.

"We have crafted the program to be very quick in terms of turnaround," Bennett said. The city should start handing out the loans within days, "the exact number of days, we're working on, but it will be within days," she said.

The city isn't sure what the interest rates will be on the loans, but Bennett said recipients will have up to five years to

thanks to people staying in their homes rather than shopping. Gov. J.B. Pritzker's expected shelter-in-place order will further restrict neighborhood stores from operating.

In addition to checking applicants' finances, the administration also will decide whether a business is the type of place they want to support. Businesses that shouldn't expect help from the city fund include "anybody that does, for example, sexual performances," Bennett said. —*John Byrne*

## 2:53 p.m.: Cupich asks Catholic churches to ring bells 5 times a day for coronavirus prayers

Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich is inviting Catholics and their neighbors to unite in prayer during the COVID-19 global pandemic, asking all churches in Cook and Lake counties to ring their bells five times a day.

The unified prayer should begin at 9 a.m. on Saturday and continue every three hours until 9 p.m. with parishes ringing church bells at every scheduled prayer time.

"Our hope is that people will have the experience of being united in prayer, especially at a time when we are isolated," Cupich said in a statement released Friday. "We invite our neighbors throughout the archdiocese to join in pausing and lifting up in prayer all affected, so they will know of our support."

Each of the five prayers will be dedicated to a specific group of people affected by COVID-19.

The archdiocese is publishing the list of prayer intentions on its [website](#) and announcing them during a daily Mass being streamed by the archdiocese, as well as releasing the lists on social media. —*Javonte Anderson*

## 1:42 p.m. (updated 2:46 p.m.): Southwest Airlines cancels most flights in and out of Midway

Southwest Airlines said Friday that it had significantly scaled back its flights in and out of Midway Airport, its Chicago hub, days after federal authorities closed the airport's control tower after technicians tested positive for the coronavirus.

Southwest Airlines spokeswoman Brandy King said the Dallas-based airline canceled about 170 of its roughly 250 daily flights in and out of Midway due to the airspace restrictions that followed the control tower's closure. [Read more here](#). —*Associated Press*

FEEDBACK

*Editor's note: This story has been updated to reflect that most Southwest flights at Midway have been canceled.*

## 1:41 p.m.: Low-risk inmates begin exiting Cook County Jail

A number of Cook County Jail detainees — including "serial stowaway" Marilyn Hartman — have been quietly ordered released this week to help relieve jail crowding amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Cook County sheriffs identified detainees who they believed could be let go with little risk to the community, officials said. They presented that list to the Cook County state's attorney's office and to public defenders, who reviewed it and agreed to release certain defendants pending trial.

The hearings to formally release the detainees began this week, unannounced and separate from the two duty courtrooms that remain open to hear emergency matters during a widespread court shutdown. The number of inmates released was not immediately known. [Read more here](#). —*Meagan Creneau and Annie Sweeney*

## 1:33 p.m.: New Trier extends school shutdown

A day after Chicago Public Schools announced it will stay closed at least an additional three weeks, New Trier High School in Winnetka announced it will extend its closure through April 13. [Read more here.](#)

## 1:25 p.m.: Thousands of Chicago cops will have days off canceled this weekend

Thousands of Chicago police officers will have their days off canceled this weekend as part of the department's response to the threat of the coronavirus pandemic, the Tribune has learned.

The department's decision comes as Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker works out details of a statewide "shelter-in-place" order, going into effect Saturday, that would order residents to essentially stay in their homes as a drastic measure to combat spread of the virus.

According to a memo obtained by the Tribune, rank-and-file Chicago police officers and supervisors assigned to the city's 22 patrol districts will have their days of canceled on Saturday and Sunday. The extra officers will be deployed to retail areas and main thoroughfares of the city, the memo said.

The directive from a top CPD official also applies to some specialized units such as saturation, gun and gang teams, the memo states. Officers who normally work in the police academy, including recruits, who were sent to work in the patrol districts this week will also have to work Saturday and Sunday. —*Jeremy Gorner*

## 1:04 p.m.: Federal prosecutor appointed to lead task force dedicated to rooting out fraud related to COVID-19

A federal prosecutor was appointed Friday to lead a Chicago-area task force dedicated to rooting out fraud related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Tyler Murray, who heads the U.S. Attorney's Office's financial crimes section, will serve as the COVID-19 Fraud Coordinator for the Northern District of Illinois, leading investigations and prosecutions "of those who attempt to take advantage of people during this time of crisis," U.S. Attorney John Lausch said in a news release.

FEEDBACK

Fear and uncertainty over the ongoing pandemic have created a perfect environment for scammers, experts have said. In recent days, there have been reports of individuals and businesses selling fake cures or test kits for COVID-19, Lausch said. Victims have also reported receiving "phishing" emails from entities posing as the World Health Organization or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"My office will vigilantly guard the public from fraudsters who try to take advantage of a vulnerable time for our nation," Lausch said in the release. "A national crisis is by no means a safe harbor for criminal activity."

Lausch said residents should never click on links in emails from unverified sources. He also urged the public to "do your homework when it comes to donations," particularly on crowd-sourcing web sites, and never agree to submit a charitable donation using cash, gift card, or wire transfer.

Members of the public can report suspicious activity related to coronavirus on the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center at <https://www.ic3.gov/default.aspx>. —*Jason Meinen*

## 12:35 p.m.: Pritzker to issue shelter-in-place order starting Saturday, sources say

Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker plans to issue a “shelter-in-place” order for the entire state starting Saturday, essentially commanding residents to stay in their homes as the officials take drastic measures to slow the spread of the coronavirus, sources told the Tribune.

Pritzker is expected to announce the directive at a 3 p.m. Friday news conference along with Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot. Details are still being worked out, sources said.

Residents can still go to the grocery stores, put gas in their cars, take walks outside and make pharmacy runs. All local roads, including the interstate highways and tollways, will remain open to traffic, as well. [Read more here.](#)

## 12:20 p.m.: Craft beer breweries allowed to make home deliveries

The bad news is that Illinois’ Craft Beer Week, scheduled for May 15-22, has been postponed indefinitely.

The good news, for craft brewers and craft-beer devotees, is that the Illinois Liquor Control Commission has agreed to allow craft breweries to conduct residential deliveries, effective immediately. [Read more here.](#) —*Phil Vettel*

## 11:51 a.m.: Chicago chefs make massive ‘call to action’ online video campaign

Chicago chefs and restaurateurs have organized a “Chefs Call To Action” campaign to push legislators to include restaurants and industry workers in any federal stimulus packages intended to help the economy. [Read more here.](#) —*Phil Vettel*

## 11:27 a.m.: Indiana postpones primary due to coronavirus

Indiana political leaders said Friday that they decided to postpone the state's May 5 primary because of concern about the coronavirus pandemic.

Republican Gov. Eric Holcomb said during a news conference with the state GOP and Democratic chairmen that the Indiana primary will instead be held on June 2.

Neighboring Ohio and Kentucky are among at least seven other states that have postponed their primaries, and others are considering increased voting by mail. —*Associated Press*

## 11:08 a.m. (updated 12:45 p.m.): Advocate hospitals pause most coronavirus testing

A major Chicago-area hospital system announced Friday that it has suspended its drive-up coronavirus testing sites because of a national shortage of test kits and processing materials.

Advocate Aurora Health in a news release said state health officials and the Illinois Hospital Association had implemented new testing protocols “to conserve tests for those in critical need.”

Patients experiencing non-severe coronavirus symptoms will be told to self-quarantine at home, the release said. Hospital patients with critical coronavirus symptoms will be evaluated and treated, according to the hospital system.

FEEDBACK

“In the meantime, we will continue our efforts to build emergency department triage units.” —*Angie Leventis Lourgos*

*Editor's note: This story has been updated to reflect that Advocate hospitals are suspending drive-up testing only. Severely ill patients will still be tested, a spokeswoman said.*

## 10: 57 a.m.: Hospital officials: Consider reopening shuttered hospitals

The state's hospital administrators are recommending that Gov. J.B. Pritzker consider reopening at least three recently shuttered hospitals to ease the strain on Illinois' medical system as the number of COVID-19 cases mounts.

Westlake Hospital in west suburban Melrose Park, [Metro South Medical Center in Blue Island](#) and Vibra Hospital in Springfield all closed within the last two years, a spokesman for the Illinois Health and Hospitals Association said. The organization is urging the state to look into using the facilities to help relieve the burdens on the state's hospital system.

Whether expanded facilities come from reopened hospitals, converted vacant space or temporary construction carried out by the National Guard, none of the new facilities will take weeks to outfit for use, said IHA spokesman Danny Chun.

“It's not going to be instantaneous. You still to have to get equipment there, and that takes time,” Chun said. —*David Heinzmann*

## 10:49 a.m.: At ease, Chicago. The Illinois National Guard is not coming to put you on lockdown.

With Gov. J.B. Pritzker confirming he is considering a “shelter-in-place order,” questions arose about how it would be enforced. As trains transporting military tanks and Humvees traveled through the Chicago area the past few days, rumors took root on social media that the Illinois National Guard would play a role in imposing the directive.

The Guard [quickly shot it down](#).

### FEEDBACK

“Those (tanks and Humvees) are not ours,” said Lt. Col. Bradford Leighton of the Illinois National Guard. “The military moves equipment all the time by train. If we were to move, we wouldn't be doing it by train. We would drive.”

Though the governor activated the Illinois National Guard earlier this week to help combat the virus, the service members don't have a role in enforcing any lockdown order issued by the government.

Instead, 60 service members will be deployed to establish drive-up testing sites, help with food delivery to disadvantaged families impacted by school closures and possibly prepare closed hospitals to reopen.

There are no plans to have the troops with a potential shelter-in-place order, Leighton said. The vast majority of currently activated troops are health-care professionals – doctors, nurses, medical technicians – who would not be tapped for an law-enforcement assignment.

“We have never even discussed a quarantine mission for the Illinois National Guard.” Leighton said. “It's never come

Leighton said he understands anxieties are high amid the pandemic, but the Guard is not the boogeyman.

“We are your friends, neighbors and co-workers,” he said. “We’re fellow worshippers at your church, synagogue, mosque or wherever you worship. We are part of the community. We are you. We are not going to invade Chicago. We are here to help.” —*Stacy St. Clair*

### **10:12 a.m.: Trade show drawing 50,000 visitors to Merchandise Mart canceled**

NeoCon, a commercial interiors trade show that annually draws 50,000 visitors to the Merchandise Mart, has been canceled because of the coronavirus outbreak.

The event’s organizers announced the cancellation Friday, saying the next event would be June 14-16 of next year. This year would have been the 52nd edition of the event, and it is the first time it has been canceled.

The cancellation comes three days after organizers said they were postponing the event from this June until a later date could be arranged. But on Friday, they said in a statement that canceling the three-day event “is the best course of action considering the on-going COVID-19 outbreak and the unknown duration for social distancing and other measures.” —*Ryan Ori*

### **9:57 a.m.: Kraft Heinz to donate \$12 million to ease coronavirus burden**

Kraft Heinz announced Friday that it will donate \$12 million globally to help ease the burden of the coronavirus, more than half of it in cash and food donations to help U.S. consumers.

The packaged food company, which is headquartered in Chicago and Pittsburgh, is giving \$1.9 million in cash to the hunger relief organization Feeding America to help support food banks near its offices and plants, including the Greater Chicago Food Depository. It also will donate \$4.7 million in Kraft Macaroni and Cheese, Heinz Gravy and Planters Nut Mixes, among other products, to U.S. food banks.

Kraft Heinz said it has significantly ramped up food production as consumers flock to grocery stores to stock up on shelf-stable goods.

FEEDBACK

“We at Kraft Heinz have an enormously important role to play in making sure people have the food and nourishment they need – and that’s especially critical at this challenging moment,” said Kraft Heinz CEO Miguel Patricio in a news release. “This donation is an immediate and impactful way we can help our neighbors in need around the world and help fill this critical gap.” —*Alexia Elejalde-Ruiz*

### **9:55 a.m.: CTA ridership continues to fall, but no service cuts planned**

With students and workers staying home to avoid the spread of the new coronavirus, the CTA has seen a total ridership drop of 68%.

Ridership has fallen off the most on trains, at 75%, with bus ridership down 59% compared with normal service levels, the agency reported.

Other transit agencies around the country are also seeing big drops, and both [Metra and the South Shore Line are planning service cuts next week.](#)

“Public transit is an essential service, and it’s important to keep trains and buses running for all Chicagoans who rely on the service,” the agency said in an email. It added that it was too soon to know what impact the virus might have on future service levels.

Mayor Lori Lightfoot has stressed the importance of public transit during the crisis, and has said that there are no plans to shut it down. —*Mary Wisniewski*

## 9:53 a.m. (updated at 5:37 p.m.): ICE won’t accept bond money in Chicago for detained immigrants, agency says

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is no longer accepting bond payments for detained people at the agency’s Chicago office amid closures related to efforts to contain COVID-19, according to an official with ICE.

The federal agency had previously stopped taking payments at its offices in Milwaukee and Springfield, Missouri, but Chicago has now been added to the list. The Chicago office will remain closed for the next 14 days, according to the ICE official, who asked not to be named because she wasn’t authorized to release the information.

Anyone seeking to bond out someone out from an area detention facility will have to travel to Indianapolis, Louisville, Wichita, Kansas; or Kansas City, Missouri, according to the official. The detained person will then be released from the facility where the person is being held. Around Chicago, ICE contracts with some local jails to detain people in immigration custody.

The McHenry County Jail is one of the facilities ICE uses. That facility will not directly release anyone from immigration custody. If a person there posts bond, the person will be transferred to a different facility and released from there, if a bond payment is posted before 11 a.m. that day, according to the ICE official.

As of Thursday, there had been no confirmed cases of COVID-19 among federal employees working out of the Chicago office, according to an ICE official.

In New Jersey, a medical staff member at the Elizabeth Detention Center where people in ICE custody are kept tested positive for COVID-19 this week, according to the Marshall Project, a nonprofit news organization. [Read more here.](#) —*Elvia Malagón and Laura Rodríguez Presa*

FEEDBACK

## 9:51 a.m.: North of Illinois border, Milwaukee mayor under self-quarantine

Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett to the list of politicians who are self-quarantining after coming into contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.

Barrett announced on Thursday night that he was self-quarantining for 14 days. He came to that decision after consulting with public health officials.

The 66-year-old mayor says he intends to continue working from home, using teleconference and videoconference.

U.S. Rep. Gwen Moore, also of Milwaukee, said Monday she was self-quarantining after coming into contact on March 8 with someone who tested positive. Former Gov. Scott Walker also self-quarantined himself for two weeks for the same reason. [Read more.](#) —*Associated Press*

As the Chicago area came to a standstill in an effort to contain the new coronavirus, many of David Falato's employees chose to stay home.

Falato co-owns five Jet's Pizza franchises in the city. He sympathizes with his workers, who can return to work once they're comfortable doing so, but with business still strong as customers stay home and order take-out, Falato was in need of help quick.

"At each store I lost about 20% of the staff in the past week," Falato said. "I need cashiers, line-cooks and drivers to continue to operate."

On Thursday, Falato, who is recruiting about 20 workers, said he hired five drivers as pizza orders continued to roll in.

Falato isn't alone. Certain types of businesses — especially grocers and delivery services — are rushing to hire thousands of workers to handle a crush of business related to COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus.

Mariano's, Jewel-Osco, Amazon and Domino's Pizza have all embarked on hiring sprees to keep up with demand. [Read more here.](#) —*Abdel Jimenez*

## 9:41 a.m.: Suspected coronavirus contact in Cook County State's Attorney's office

An employee of the Cook County State's Attorney's office has had "significant contact" with a person suspected of having the coronavirus, and that employee's close coworkers have been notified of the development.

According to an email obtained by the Tribune, the diagnosis of the "person under investigation" has not been confirmed, nor has any transmission of the virus been confirmed from that person to the prosecutor's office employee, who was last in the suburban Markham courthouse on Monday.

But "in light of the unavailability of testing and out of an abundance of caution," the office decided to notify employees who have been in close contact with that employee, according to the email, sent late Thursday evening.

"Unfortunately, like all large workplaces and communities, we are likely to learn of positive test results within the SAO and/or staff family members as more tests become available." The email advised employees to monitor themselves for any symptoms of the disease, and reminded them to "continue to exercise care in all your interactions." —*Megan Crepeau*

FEEDBACK

## 9:35 a.m.: Here's how Aurora and Naperville doctors are prepping for surge of COVID-19 patients

Hospitals and doctor's offices in Aurora and Naperville are preparing for an expected surge in COVID-19 patients, taking unusual steps to meet unusual challenges.

Some have reassigned medical staff and quickly ramped-up remote health services, known as telemedicine. Many hospitals across the area have restricted or eliminated visitors, and are postponing elective surgeries. Some, including Northwestern Medicine Delnor Hospital in Geneva and Edward Hospital in Naperville, are setting up outdoor coronavirus testing tents.

But as they make changes, they are also contending with staff who might need time off to take care of their own family members or children now home from school.

“It’s very common for people to have family at home and so, yes, it’s a particular challenge for everyone right now because children are home and ... there could be other members of the family that need to be cared for,” said Linnea Windel, president and CEO of VNA Health Care, an Aurora-based community health care provider. [Read more.](#) — *Sarah Freishtat and Erin Hegarty*

### **9:35 a.m.: Indiana cancels boys basketball tournament for first time in 109 years; governor says he supports postponing primary**

After twisting in the wind for six days, the Indiana High School Athletic Association finally pulled the plug on the boys basketball tournament. An email from the IHSAA on Thursday afternoon confirmed the inevitable.

For the first time in its 109-year history, the tournament won’t be played because of the disruption to school caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The announcement came shortly after Gov. Eric Holcomb ordered all schools to remain closed until May 1. [Read more.](#)

Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb said Thursday that he would support postponing the Indiana primary election amid the spread of the COVID-19 virus, but a final decision has not been announced.

Holcomb said the May 5 primary is “under discussion” by the Secretary of State’s office, and that Secretary of State Connie Lawson has been in communication with the state’s Democratic and Republican party leaders.

But, Holcomb said he hopes the decision is to postpone the primary out of concern for poll workers, who tend to be elderly, and voters amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I personally support postponing the primary election,” Holcomb said. “The details have to be worked out and the Secretary of State is doing that.” [Read more.](#) — *Mike Hutton, Alexandra Kukulka and Amy Lavalley*

### **9:30 a.m.: Coronavirus hammers Chicago’s hotel industry**

FEEDBACK

Hotel occupancy rates have plummeted. Housekeeping staff, bellhops, valets and other workers are being let go, not knowing when — or if — they’ll be back. Some of Chicago’s swankiest properties have gone dark, temporarily closing their doors to overnight guests

An already dire situation is set to get even worse as the new coronavirus [puts the brakes on travel](#) and sends the lodging industry into a tailspin, unleashing ripple effects across the economy. [Read more.](#) — *Lori Rackl*

### **7:38 a.m.: UIC is 1 of 3 men’s basketball teams in self-isolation**

Men’s basketball players, coaches and staff at the University of Illinois-Chicago, Siena College and Wright State are self-isolating as a precaution after two officials who called the school’s games tested positive for the coronavirus.

Siena spokesman Mike Demos said Thursday the school learned earlier in the week that two officials who worked Siena’s game against Manhattan in the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference Tournament on March 11 in Atlantic City had tested positive for COVID-19.

Demos said New York state and Albany County health department officials advised self-isolation for 14 days from the date of possible exposure. Fans who attended the game are not considered to be at risk, he said.

“A positive test for the official was confirmed on March 18, and we further advised our men’s basketball student-athletes and staff,” UIC said in a statement. [Read more.](#) —*Associated Press*

### 6:45 a.m.: Bartlett preschooler tests positive for the coronavirus

A young child in a preschool [in Bartlett has tested positive for the coronavirus](#), the superintendent of District U-46 told parents in a letter.

The child was enrolled at the Independence Center for Early Learning, a preschool for children ages 3 to 5.

“The student has been isolated and is expected to remain in isolation/self quarantine to prevent spreading the virus,” Superintendent. Tony Sanders wrote.

Sanders did not give the age or any other details of the child.

The superintendent also told parents the district was working on plans if the district remains closed beyond March 30. Details of “Phase 2 of our Distance Learning Plan” were to be released Friday, he said.

“However, we will await further guidance from the governor and state health officials on whether schools will remain closed past March 30,” he added. — *Chicago Tribune staff*

### 6:20 a.m. Chicago City Hall closes to the general public

Chicago’s City Hall is closing to the public until further notice, effective Friday, under an order made public late Thursday by Mayor Lori Lightfoot. The building will stay open for essential personnel, aldermen and working journalists under Lightfoot’s order. [Read more here.](#) — *Rosemary Sobol*

FEEDBACK

## Breaking coronavirus news

Stay up to date with the latest information on coronavirus with our [breaking news alerts](#).

## Thursday, March 19

Here’s a recap of coronavirus updates in the Chicago area and Illinois from Thursday:

- Officials reassured Illinoisans that [essential aspects of daily life will continue](#), as the human toll of the coronavirus escalated with three more deaths and 134 new cases reported, [bringing the statewide total to 422](#).
- In a televised speech aimed at reassuring the public that her administration is up to the task of curbing the coronavirus outbreak, Mayor Lori Lightfoot announced she will [keep CPS closed through April 20](#).
- Oak Park’s shelter-in-place order was set to take effect. [Could the rest of Illinois soon follow?](#)

- A Tribune editor underwent a drive-thru test for COVID-19. [Here's what that was like.](#)
- How worried is Chicago about the coronavirus? We asked residents from across the city and [here's what they said.](#)
- Illinois nursing homes have been among worst for following infection-control rules. [That leaves longtime critics worried how homes will stop COVID-19.](#)
- Chicago police and paramedics just announced their first coronavirus cases. [How are they dealing with COVID-19 on the front line?](#)
- Due to deep drops in ridership, [Metra is cutting weekday service in half](#) starting Monday.
- For ride-share and taxi drivers, closed businesses and social distancing [mean no rides.](#) One driver said he recently waited half a day at O'Hare for a single fare.
- As day cares shut down, Chicago-area parents must [juggle child care and working from home.](#)

## Wednesday, March 18

Here's a recap of coronavirus updates in the Chicago area and Illinois from Wednesday:

- [128 new cases](#) were reported in Illinois. There are now [288 reported cases across 17 counties.](#)
- An additional 24 individuals at a long-term care facility in DuPage County tested positive for the coronavirus, [bringing the total number of patients there to 46.](#)
- [Oak Park issued a shelter-in-place order](#) as River Forest and Forest Park leaders urged residents to comply as well.
- Education officials indicated there is a "very real possibility" that [Illinois' school shutdown could be extended.](#)
- Here's [how Illinois hospitals are preparing](#) for a flood of COVID-19 patients.
- Drive-thru coronavirus testing is starting up at some Chicago-area hospitals. [But it's by appointment only.](#)
- [Chicago Public Library will close the majority but not all of its locations,](#) drawing the ire of the union representing municipal employees who demanded all libraries be closed.
- ICE will [delay some deportations](#) as pressure mounts for Chicago's Immigration Court to close.
- Toilet paper and hand sanitizer aren't the only items consumers worried about the new coronavirus have been hunting for: [Ammo is also flying off the shelves at local gun stores.](#)
- A private school in Chicago's Lincoln Square community has [reported six cases of coronavirus.](#)
- Does the coronavirus have you worried about toilet paper? [Using paper towels or napkins can lead to plumbing problems.](#)
- A day after announcing he had activated an Illinois National Guard unit, Gov. J.B. Pritzker acknowledged [more service members may be deployed.](#)
- The coronavirus may [imperil Chicago's more than decadelong construction boom.](#) "We're mentally preparing for a shutdown."
- Several Chicago restaurants are open for delivery or pickup amid the coronavirus shutdown. [Check out this running list.](#)

FEEDBACK

## Tuesday, March 17

Here's a recap of coronavirus updates in the Chicago area and Illinois from Tuesday:

- 55 new cases of COVID-19 [brought the total in Illinois to 160.](#) Among the new cases were [17 patients and four staff members at a long-term care facility](#) in Willowbrook.

- Despite coronavirus anxiety and problems at the polls, Cook County and Chicago [avoided record-low turnout](#) in Tuesday's primary election.
- Coronavirus concerns are thinning the crowds on public transit. If you must ride, [here are ways to be safe](#).
- Illinois will allow marijuana dispensaries to [take orders from medical patients at the curb or in the parking lot](#).
- For a suburban woman on the coronavirus-stricken Princess cruise, [the trouble started when she left the boat](#).
- What if a Chicago doctor has to choose which coronavirus patient gets a respirator? [Pondering the unlikely and unthinkable](#).
- Every public and private school in Illinois closed Tuesday because of the coronavirus. [Here's what you need to know](#).
- These [videos of penguins running free inside the Shedd Aquarium](#) are just the coronavirus distraction we need.

## Monday, March 16

Here's a recap of coronavirus updates in the Chicago area and Illinois from Monday:

- Gov. J.B. Pritzker [limited crowd sizes in Illinois to under 50](#), the latest in a stream of restrictions handed down in recent days.
- The ban came as Illinois officials reported 12 new cases of COVID-19 in the state, [bringing the total since the start of the outbreak to 105](#).
- Cook County officials are considering [so-called compassionate releases](#) to ease coronavirus risk in jails.
- Illinoisans readied for a primary Election Day like no other, [with fear of the spread of coronavirus raising concerns of low turnout](#).
- CPS prepared to shut down for a second time this school year as [the teachers strike now looks like a "dry run"](#) for a new disruption.
- How an [extraordinary secret meeting of Chicago chefs](#) grew into a commanding voice to seek help from the governor.

## Sunday, March 15

Here's a recap of coronavirus updates in the Chicago area and Illinois from Sunday:

- Chicago moved closer to a total shutdown as the [number of cases of COVID-19 in Illinois grew to 93](#) and Gov. J.B. Pritzker [ordered all bars and restaurants in the state closed](#) to the public.
- Efforts to break the logjam of international passengers arriving at O'Hare intensified. The federal government will [double staff at U.S. Customs and Border Patrol at O'Hare](#), Pritzker said.
- Jewel-Osco, Walmart and Trader Joe's are among the chains that are [shortening their hours so they can clean and restock](#) as shoppers flock to stores.
- Amid coronavirus concerns, Chicago broke a [World War II-era record for vote-by-mail applications](#) and [set a new high for primary early voting](#).

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